

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** October 13, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Swift Lazy Conservation Easement (R1)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 Min

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### **Background:**

FWP is working with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to negotiate a conservation outcome on approximately 15,300 acres of commercial timberland owned by Weyerhaeuser within the Swift and Lazy Creek watersheds north of Whitefish Lake. The project would involve FWP holding a conservation easement on all or most of the property, depending on final negotiations and funding sources. The property has long been viewed as one of the top conservation priorities in Region One, and was identified as such in the State Wildlife Action Plan. The property provides habitat and supports hunting opportunities for deer, elk, moose, bear, lion, wolf, and forest grouse, as well as providing important habitat for 42 species of greatest conservation need. The project would be funded primarily through federal grants from the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bonneville Power Administration, along with private funding through TPL, but may include some funding through Habitat Montana as well. These corporate lands have a long history of public access that would be permanently secured through this project.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results:**

At this preliminary stage, we have not engaged in public outreach. However, the potential project has been reported in the local newspaper, and we have received letters of support for our federal grant applications from the entire Montana congressional delegation, Governor Bullock, all of our federal agency partners, the City of Whitefish, and 15 local and statewide conservation groups.

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

At this early stage of our discussions, there are several viable alternatives for conserving this property that we would like to discuss with Weyerhaeuser, all of which would involve FWP holding an interest in most, or possibly all of the property. The property is very likely to be developed for a planned, gated community because of the amenities that it offers, its proximity to Whitefish, and the active Weyerhaeuser real estate program.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale:**

FWP recommends that the Commission endorse this proposed project so we may work with Weyerhaeuser to find a conservation solution that meets the Company's needs while also conserving this valuable fish and wildlife habitat and public recreational opportunity.

### **Proposed Motion:**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse FWP's proposal to negotiate and analyze conservation terms, working toward securing the Swift/Lazy Creek conservation easement.